



The Army's Campaign Against Sexual Violence: Dealing With The Careerist Bystanders

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The Army's ongoing struggle to win its battle against sexual violence within its ranks can be approached in two ways. The dominant one is to define the issue as one of a perpetrator, a victim, and a crime; the results of the institution's inability to enforce professional standards of interpersonal respect and behavior. Following this approach, Army leaders are to be more compliance oriented, leading from decades-old theories of transactional leadership—punishments and rewards doled out as extrinsic motivators for Soldiers to abide by the minimum legal standards of behavior.

The problem with this approach is that it has manifestly failed. So, now that the Army has correctly made winning this critical campaign its first priority, would a different approach be more successful? I suggest that it would, one focused on the deeper cultural change needed and on the development of the leaders who are responsible and accountable to maintain a professional culture of trust within the Army.

During the recent Army-wide stand-down to address this issue, one of the training films placed this longer-term, cultural approach into sharp relief.¹ It broadened the issue beyond perpetrator and victim to include many other actors who have not been sufficiently involved in the past, but must be in the future—the bystanders to the situations that lead to sexual violence.

At one point in the film, a young female Army private in basic training, among the most vulnerable of Soldiers, narrates what happened after she had been assaulted by her drill sergeant. Seeking help, she goes to another drill sergeant within the training company with her story. His

response is sickening:

I said I would like to talk to a different drill instructor. And that was when another drill sergeant came up and he pulled me into that office and I had told him everything that had happened. And he pretty much asked me if I wanted to open up that can of worms. He said, 'That is my battle buddy's career you are about to mess with.'

CAREER? CAREER?? In one sentence, indeed in one word, notice just how clearly the second drill sergeant has characterized a major reason the Army has been unsuccessful in dealing with sexual violence. He immediately and reflexively placed more value on his personal career and that of his battle buddy drill sergeant than he did on the well-being of a subordinate Soldier and the pursuit of justice and trust within his unit—characteristics essential to a professional Army. In sharp relief, he personifies the Army's bystander problem—too many leaders who as careerists are so self-serving that when the inevitable test of character comes, first priority goes to self rather than to subordinate, unit, mission, the Army, or its service to America.

To be sure, all humans are by their nature somewhat self-serving, and self-abnegation does not come naturally. And, truth be told, the Army has itself perpetuated much of the careerist mentality with its industrial-age personnel policies—e.g., an ineffective top-down performance evaluation system and the 20-year retirement. Any Soldier in their second decade of service who is induced by such extrinsic motivators will be risk adverse to a degree. But that fact still does not render the failure of this Army drill sergeant as anything other than morally reprehensible and professionally nauseating.

If there are significant numbers of such careerists among the Army's leadership, and there are many indicators that there are, the campaign against sexual violence will be a long slog for sure. And it is not just sexual violence. We know that in the many recent cases of moral failure by senior Army leaders, there were bystanders in each case that clearly did not endanger their careers to bring a halt to the unethical or immoral behaviors. Sadly, careerists make good bystanders in most of the major challenges the Army is now facing!

To dig deeper, how do we understand an Army careerist as distinct from an Army professional. I suggest we start with the Army's Ethic and note their leadership responses to it. As codified now in doctrine, the Army Profession's Ethic has both legal and moral foundations.² The legal foundation is manifested primarily in statutory codifications, such as the Uniformed Code of

Military Justice and various Army regulations. Such legal and administrative norms produce a *motivation of obligation* in Soldiers—one must do their duty, or there are legal strictures for “dereliction of duty.” In this context, leaders are those who dole out rewards and punishments in individual transactions to induce acceptable behavior.

The moral foundations of the profession’s Ethic, however, are the higher standards, appealing as they do to the *motivation of aspiration* regarding who the Soldier aspires to become, both individually and as part of a larger cause. Not codified, they are rather held, adapted, and passed on by Army leaders through their transformational leadership reinforced by a martial culture that socializes, indeed professionalizes, civilians into their role as Soldiers and, ultimately, future leaders.

Transformational leaders—who are themselves moral exemplars of the Army Values, the Soldier’s Creed, and the Warrior’s Ethos—are the real means of motivation and inspiration that can move the bystanders off the sidelines. These leaders do not seek a career; Army professionals aspire only to a life of service and sacrifice to the Republic. Such rewards of a life’s calling have far greater personal satisfaction than job holders find in a career. Just ask any Army professional!

The better approach to combating sexual violence, then, is for the Army to address its culture by intensifying the development and retention of such transformational leaders. Fortunately, the current Army downsizing is a fortuitous opportunity that cannot be missed in this regard. Given the Army’s past failures that produced the current crisis, the compliance approach must be pursued to be sure. There should be more prosecutions, more cases in military courts, and more punishments for this type of criminal behavior. But that approach must rapidly be supplanted by culling Army leaders at all levels who have adopted the careerist mindset and behavior, and who are thus incapable of motivating bystanding Soldiers off of the sidelines.

Simply stated, the Army will not successfully address the issue of sexual violence until it addresses the character of its leadership at all ranks. The Army defines a leader’s character as “. . . a person’s moral and ethical qualities [that] help a leader determine what is right and gives the leader the motivation to do what is appropriate *regardless of the circumstances or consequences* (italics added by author).”³ When the Army has eliminated leaders who are more careerist than servant, something it certainly is capable of doing in the near term, it will have successfully dealt with sexual violence within its ranks.

ENDNOTES

1. See video available from website of the Center for Army Profession and Ethic (CAPE), cape.army.mil/case%20studies/pfeschuette.php.
2. *Army Doctrine and Training Publication (ADRP) 1, The Army Profession*, Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, June 2013, available from usacac.army.mil/cac2/MCCOE/Doctrine2015Tables.asp.
3. ADRP 6-22, *Army Leadership*, Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, June 2012, para. 1-30, p. 1-5, available from usacac.army.mil/cac2/MCCOE/Doctrine2015Tables.asp.

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